Le Livre (The Book)

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Le Livre (The Book)

by celestialcello

Summary

Will’s unbidden joy manifested in the form of the deepened crinkle around his eyes, ‘Not just that. What I would like to offer you is something grander than even the power to raise the dead back to life.’

Hannibal tilted his head and returned the smile, ‘And when the clock strikes 12, my soul would be damned for an eternity in Hell? A little dull, don’t you think, Will?’

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Original prompt list from tarmasz on Instagram (https://www.instagram.com/tarmasz/?hl=en)

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

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The year was sometime in between the haze of 1960 and 1970 with no certainty, an early winter morning when the weightless sunlight sent specks of dusts dancing in its pale, golden touch that reached even the most obscure corner of the unlit, muted foyer in Lecter Castle.

Hannibal Lecter was still in his bedroom, slightly unusual considering that he had promised Chiyoh to make breakfast after the tedious event with a promising potential. Yet another time he had proven to himself the futility of justice and truth. Instead of resuming his immaculate routine that has become an integrated part of his personality since his Paris years, Hannibal spent a few more minutes reading a leather-bound, untitled booklet with yellowing edges and esoteric patterns that seemed to be glowing as he breathed.

Among the boundless blankness like the snow field of a lifeless winter, a single line of impatient text has appeared overnight. The handwriting was… rigid, all harsh turns of curve and sharp angles, contrasting with Lecter's own brand of convoluted decoration and meandering stretches.

'You know the man did not kill your sister.'

He contemplated at it for a few more moments, entertaining the possibility of an unknown entity breaking into his room under the guise of moon and instead of taking his life, had chosen instead to leave a written message on a trinket he had foraged from the burnt debris of the library. The message was not even remotely intimidating or unsettling by his standard. But whoever that had the courage to be in the same confined space as Hannibal should be scared of him on any given day. In fact, Hannibal was deeply entertained, and in a moment of curiosity, whispered into the empty room.

'Of course. I was just curious what Chiyoh would do.'

Nothing happened, to begin with. And Hannibal shook his head in quiet disbelief of himself, refusing to acknowledge the slight disappointment. But just as he placed the book back on his nightstand and about to start the day, its page suddenly flipped open again in a quick snap to the same page. Raising his eyebrow, he casted another look at the book with an almost smile around the corner of his mouth.

'Bâtard.' Apparently that was the Book's response. He did not condone rudeness usually, but in this particular scenario, Hannibal was surprised that he was not offended. Probably in part because whatever creature currently residing among the pages could do nothing about the truth it has witnessed. At least not immediately. He unrolled the leather bundle containing his pencils and scalpels lying beside the bronze lamp, and scribbled neatly underneath the angry reply.

'Attendez-vous votre etiquette, M. Livre.'

'Et vous, votre arrogance. Et ne m'appelez jamais <<M.Livre>> !'

At this point, Hannibal was practically enthralled with talking to this book - or whatever it could be. His mind quickly flitted through all the possible mystic figures in various folklores spanning from the depth of Lithuanian forest to the obscure lanes among Japanese mountains. He thought about devils - it would be unbecoming for any angelic being to swear, he supposed? Nor would it condone what he had done in an almost amicable way.

‘Then we would have to figure out a way to resolve the disagreement. But as you may or may not know, to my eyes you are indeed, a book.’

He opened the curtain to take in the overgrown garden in its wasted beauty of twisting branches and floors of dried grasses, and recalled with a hint of fondness the vague memory of Mischa burying herself inside a pile of fallen leaves. He killed the three men in honour of her, but not completely for her. Though lost to another time, it was through violence Hannibal was able to see himself. Those blood-stained, glassy gaze of the corpse served as his very own enoptromancy, seeking a shreds of certainty among the constantly altering topology of his mind. The foundation of his palace, its blue floor and spanning marble steps.

The book has quieted down in recognition of a battle lost, stubbornly refusing to give Hannibal any more joy he had derived from their brief conversation. Tracing the undeciphrable patterns on the cover, Hannibal carefully slotted the book into the handbag he had packed for the trip ahead. The boat to Stockholm was leaving in three hours, he really should hurry. The aroma of coffee had seeped in from underneath the door to his bedroom, indicating that his surrogate sister has decided to take on the responsibility of preparing their last shared breakfast here.

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That night, in the subpar hotel room of Haugesund, Hannibal drifted into a sound sleep almost as soon as he scrubbed the stale scent of a sea trip off himself.

He dreamed.

~*~

He was back inside the library of the castle. He couldn’t tell the time - there was no window in that part of the building, so as to not distract the reader from the change of daylight. All the burnt marks were purged from the shelves and the dead moths and dusts were swept away to reveal the intricate wooden pattern on the floor.

Sitting in one of the armchairs by the fireplace (the flame was an unnatural, frosty crimson, he noticed), was a young man, probably in his late twenties or thirties. There was something distracting about his face that masked any indication of potential age or birthplace. Hannibal studied the bone structure, and decided that its beauty was not dissimilar to that of Praxiteles’ finest creations.

The young man watched him with a quiet curiosity, yet did not address him apart from his intent gaze. Hannibal caught a glimpse of confusion on the man's face as he made his way to the empty seat opposite him.

'My apology for the unintentional offence earlier. But please know that I…appreciate your choice of venue tonight. It does hold a special place in my heart.'

'You surprise me, Hannibal Lecter. You are supposed to be driven into madness when you set foot in here, at least that was the intention.' The Being straightened himself up a little as Hannibal settled down unfazed. In the ombre out of reach of the silently roiling flame, Hannibal was momentarily distracted by the slender fingers wrapped in marble-like skins. He considered whether they would be warm to touch.

'Also, I can hear what you are thinking.' The other man frowned in annoyance, curled his hands almost self-consciously, a gesture to which Hannibal offered a sincere chuckle.

'You still have not informed me of your title.'

'I have wandered the Earth in many names and forms.'

'An alias, then. For your form did not match your nature, and you have expressed your disapproval of my interpretation rather eloquently,' Hannibal offered.

The Being considered the proposition in silence, then grinned, his vulpine eyes glinting in the odd light, 'William. But I have a slight preference for Will.'

'Were you a warrior?'

'In one of the lives I had lead. We have both lived more than one realities, although incomparable in magnitude.' Will studied the change in Hannibal's breath, and knew he had caught his interest once again.

'Are you alluding at… some possibilities, Will?'

'Perhaps I am, but I'd like to hear your interpretation first.'

Hannibal lowered his eyes briefly in consideration, then looked up at Will again with a renewed understanding, 'Is it regarding Mischa?'

Will's unbidden joy manifested in the form of deepened crinkles around his eyes, 'Not just that. What I would like to offer you is something grander than even the power to raise the dead back to life.'

Hannibal tilted his head and returned the smile, 'And when the clock strikes twelve, my soul would be damned for an eternity in Hell? A little dull, don't you think, Will?'

'No, Hannibal. You will be the Hell. Your bones its pathway, your heart the fuel to the unquenchable fire, your mind would be made the Head of The Court. To be honest, it was a very generous offer on my part. You would be immortal.'

'Yet I would also cease to exist.'

'A relative concept.'

‘Why me, then?’

The flames raised higher in the fireplace, overflowing, staining everything within his sight with vermillion shadow, leave them burning in a freezing chill.

‘A necessary trade-off, Hannibal. You have offended those residing in the Hours of the Day, but personally I see only blindness in their judgement. Consumption of human flesh is not their prerogatives, only their claim.’

‘I would like to make you one of the Hours of the Night. As the Rules dictate, we cannot very much kill each other. It really is a curse.’

Hannibal stood up to this latest revelation, several strains of inferences coursing through his mind, gleaning any possible evidences from both past memories of the unseeable world recorded only in myths and tales, as well as their brief encounter. He needed leverage to extricate himself from the snare.

Will remained undisturbed by the fact that Hannibal was practically looming over him from several steps away. Triumphantly he looked up, already constructing the magnificence of the new Gate in his mind. He frowned only when he found that there was no anger nor fear in the fathomless darkness of Hannibal’s gaze.

‘I believe that there must be another way to circumvent the ire of the Hours, isn’t there, Will?’

‘A few, in fact, but you would not be able to accomplish it, Hannibal, for you are only mortal. The only thing you are risking is your own life here - the Lord of Pigpen was eager to get a taste of you.’

‘Then I’d like to propose a new game.’

Will laughed incredulously at Hannibal’s grave tone, ‘And what are you proposing?’

‘Simple, I have one chance at guessing your true name, Will. And if I fail, I would gladly become the Gate.’

‘And if you win?’

‘Are the Hours bond to protect their ward?’

‘We have Orders that represent our honour, therefore, yes, for entirely selfish reasons we do.’

‘Then you will be bond to take me as your Orders.’

The impatient flame spilled over the ceiling and window, and in his eyes Will’s form shifted into uncertain shadows with glimpse of antlers shining like spears, he appeared freshly bathed in blood and viscera.

‘Hubris is the downfall, Hannibal.’

Hannibal knelt down on a single knee almost instinctively, yet he did not for a second lowered his head. Slowly, he uttered his answer.

‘I name you the Hour lost from both Day and Night, the watchman over the River of Time, the only one that has travelled among human on Earth and was remembered in a million guises.’

‘I name you the demon presiding over knowledge. I name you - Mephistopheles, the one who negates the Light.’

And with that said the whole building crumbled down in a thundering implosion, its walls and high ceiling dissolved into shards of mercury down the lightless, fiery void beneath his feet.

For a moment Will’s hand was placed on top of his eyes, blocking out all the spectacles. It felt warm, like a heart just excavated from someone’s chest.

’So be it, then.’

~*~

He woke up just before dawn. Without switching on the lamp, Hannibal reached for the book. Traipsing through the cover again, he spelled out his own name in mendacious script on the cover with his fingertip.

End Notes

Thanks for reading and please play Cultist Simulator if you can :D

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